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Establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the region of the Middle East

The risk of nuclear proliferation in the Middle East

Establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the region of the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General

Contents

		Paragraphs	Page
I.	Introduction	1–2	2
II.	Observations	3–4	2
III.	Replies received from Governments		3
	Israel		3
	Mexico		5
	Venezuela		5

* A/58/50/Rev.1 and Corr.1.

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I. Introduction

1. In paragraph 10 of its resolution 57/55 of 22 November 2002, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to continue to pursue consultations with the States of the region of the Middle East and other concerned States, in accordance with paragraph 7 of resolution 46/30 of 6 December 1991 and taking into account the evolving situation in the region, and to seek from those States their views on the measures outlined in chapters III and IV of the study annexed to his report of 10 October 1990 (A/45/435) or other relevant measures, in order to move towards the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East. In paragraph 11 of the same resolution, the Assembly also requested the Secretary-General to submit to it at its fifty-eighth session a report on the implementation of the resolution. The present report is submitted pursuant to that request.

2. On 5 March 2003, a note verbale was sent to all Member States drawing their attention to paragraph 10 of resolution 57/55 and seeking their views on the matter. Replies have been received from Israel, Mexico and Venezuela, the text of which is reproduced in section III below. Any additional replies from Member States will be issued as addenda to the present report.

II. Observations

3. The Secretary-General notes that the issue of establishing a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the region of the Middle East remains of considerable importance. He further notes that at the second session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2005 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, the issue of the establishment of a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction received special attention. In particular, States parties reiterated their support for the establishment of such a zone in the Middle East, reaffirmed the importance of the implementation of the resolution on the Middle East adopted by the 1995 Review and Extension Conference, and also recognized that the resolution remained valid until its goals and objectives were achieved.

4. The Secretary-General has continued to carry out various consultations with concerned parties within and outside the region in order to explore further ways and means of promoting the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East. The Secretary-General is encouraged by new developments in the region, including the Road Map — the international plan for peace in the Middle East developed by the Quartet of the European Union, the Russian Federation, the United States of America and the United Nations, delivered on 30 April 2003. The Secretary-General hopes that recent developments in the region will have a positive influence towards creating a stable and secure environment that would facilitate the process of promoting the establishment of a zone free of nuclear weapons in the Middle East. The Secretary-General reaffirms the continued readiness of the United Nations to provide any assistance deemed helpful in that regard.

III. Replies received from Governments

Israel

[Original: English]
[30 May 2003]

Israel has always maintained that in the Middle East nuclear issues and all regional security issues, both conventional and non-conventional, should be dealt with in the full context of the peace process. It is in this framework that Israel supports the eventual establishment of the Middle East as a mutually verifiable nuclear-weapon-free zone that would also be free of chemical and biological weapons as well as ballistic missiles.

United Nations resolution 57/55, entitled "Establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the region of the Middle East", does not adequately reflect Israel's position vis-à-vis the nuclear issue in the Middle East. In fact, Israel has substantive and significant reservations regarding certain elements of the resolution.

Notwithstanding these reservations, for over twenty years Israel has chosen to join the consensus and has made extensive efforts to preserve the language and prevent unilateral changes. Israel has acted this way out of its belief that, instead of highlighting different positions, there is a fundamental need for building confidence and creating a common vision for all the States of the Middle East.

The promotion of this vision must take into account the particular circumstances of the Middle East. Countries in the region continue to acquire and develop weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery, deny Israel's right to exist, and continue to pursue aggressively hostile practices towards Israel. Moreover, in this region, membership in global conventions does not necessarily provide adequate assurances in view of the record of non-compliance with international obligations by certain States in the region. The case of Iraq and the widely shared concerns over Iran, especially after the recent revelations regarding its nuclear activities, exemplify this reality. This environment of growing threats has a critical impact on the region's ability to move towards the establishment of a zone free of all weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles.

Accordingly, there is an urgent need to intensify efforts to halt the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles to countries of concern in the Middle East. Those countries not only are engaged in extensive proliferation activities but also are involved in supporting terrorism. A range of international, regional and national efforts to promote a variety of measures including, inter alia, more stringent controls on sensitive exports to those countries, is an urgent necessity.

This disturbing reality in the Middle East mandates a practical step-by-step approach, bearing in mind the ultimate goal of achieving a comprehensive peace between all the States in the region. This process, as has been demonstrated by the experience of other regions, such as Latin America, is inherently an incremental one. It can only realistically begin with modest arrangements for confidence-building measures in order to build the necessary trust for more ambitious cooperative security undertakings.

Effective arms control measures can only be achieved and sustained in a region where wars, armed conflicts, terror, political hostility and incitement are not features of everyday life.

In recent years, Israel has sought to lay the enduring foundations of peace in our region based on a historic reconciliation, embodying the notions of compromise, mutual trust and respect, open borders and good neighbourliness. The basis for coexistence between Israel and its neighbours was laid in the bilateral peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan and we still hope to widen this process to encompass the Palestinians, Lebanon and Syria.

In addition, after the Madrid Conference of 1991, Israel made a substantial effort to contribute to the success of the arms control and regional security talks in the framework of the multilateral negotiations of the peace process. The Arms Control and Regional Security talks were the appropriate forum to promote confidence and to address regional security issues and challenges. Those talks were, unfortunately, discontinued by another State in the region, instead of becoming an important channel for regional dialogue.

Notwithstanding this lack of progress at the regional level, Israel attempted during the last decade to become more involved in the normative framework of international arms control efforts that do not impair our vital margins of security. These efforts constitute an important component in the overall effort to improve the regional security climate. It was in this spirit that Israel signed the Chemical Weapons Convention in 1993, the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty in 1996, and ratified the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons in 1995.

Israel adhered to the provisions of the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), respects the other supplier regimes, and participates in the UN Register on Conventional Arms. Over the last year, Israel was constructively engaged in the efforts in the United Nations and in other international forums to prevent the proliferation of ballistic missiles and their related technology. We also attach importance to the United Nations deliberations on the illicit trafficking of small arms and hope that the implementation of the programme of action will contribute to the global fight against terror.

As the international community has recognized, the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone should be based on arrangements freely arrived at among all the States of the region concerned. Such a zone can only be established through direct negotiations between the States of the region, after they recognize each other and have established full peaceful and diplomatic relations between them. It cannot be established other than by the parties themselves, nor can it be established in a situation where some of the States maintain an active state of war with Israel, refuse in principle to maintain peaceful relations with Israel, or even recognize its right to exist.

We believe that one-sided and unbalanced resolutions, aimed at isolating and alienating Israel, such as the resolution on the risk of nuclear proliferation in the Middle East, do not contribute to the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone. Moreover, they undermine the confidence and the climate of cooperation that are an essential basis for achieving that end, ignoring the complex reality of the region.

Countries, particularly in the Middle East, should realize that these resolutions cannot be a substitute for the need to conduct direct negotiations, build confidence,

reduce the threats and establish stable peaceful relations in the region, all of which are essential milestones on the way to a nuclear-weapon-free zone.

Over the years, Israel has consistently pursued the policy described above. We regard this policy to be as valid today as it has been over the last decades. It provides sound guidance for regional security, based on the foundations of stability and peace.

Mexico

[Original: Spanish]
[13 May 2003]

The Government of Mexico has supported the initiative for the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East since it was introduced in the General Assembly in 1974. The establishment and expansion of nuclear-weapon-free zones through arrangements freely arrived at among the States concerned, especially in areas of tension such as the Middle East, contribute significantly to the maintenance of international peace and security.

Mexico has therefore supported the full implementation of article VII, paragraph 16 (1), of the Final Document of the 2000 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, which recognizes that the resolution on the Middle East adopted at the 1995 Review and Extension Conference remains valid until the goals and objectives are achieved.

Mexico further expresses its satisfaction at the fact that the resolution entitled "Establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the region of the Middle East" was again adopted without a vote at the fifty-seventh session of the General Assembly (resolution 57/55).

During its membership of the Security Council, Mexico has expressed its willingness to continue consultations on the proposal for the establishment of a zone free of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East.

Lastly, the Government of Mexico reaffirms its view that the political will of States in the region is the main prerequisite for achieving effective progress in the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East.

Venezuela

[Original: Spanish]
[5 June 2003]

The Government of Venezuela has always been in favour of the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones in various regions of the world, provided that this is done within the framework created in 1999 by the United Nations Disarmament Commission for the establishment of new nuclear-weapon-free zones, that is, such zones should emerge through arrangements freely arrived at among the States of the region. Venezuela understands that such zones contribute significantly to the strengthening of the nuclear non-proliferation regime, the achievement of nuclear disarmament, and the global efforts directed towards that end. Since the Middle East

region is an especially sensitive one because of the various problems persisting in that region and the presence of weapons of mass destruction, Venezuela considers it important for the international community to focus its attention on the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East within the framework of the United Nations as a decisive step towards the achievement of peace in the region.